

The Fort Midway F

Faded, collecting dust, and ignored for several decades, on the second floor of the Midway Town Hall is perhaps the most historically significant artifact of Midway history; an eighteen star American flag. It was the first flag to fly at Fort Midway and it was carried on campaign throughout the Blackhawk Indian War of 1866 and 1867 by the Midway Battalion of the Wasatch Military District.

This article has been written to bring about a greater awareness of the existence and historical significance of this flag and to encourage an appropriate site for its public display and preservation.

On the southeast corner of the Midway Town Square is a monument that was erected on July 21, 1940, by the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers which bears this inscription:

MIDWAY FORT

When this valley was settled in 1859 two colonies were established on the west side of the Provo River. A lower and upper settlement, the latter called Mound City.

In 1866 Indian depredations caused the formation of the Wasatch County Military District and brought the people of the two settlements together for security. About seventy-five families erected homes on this site.

Sidney H. Epperson was the presiding elder. The location being Midway between the two sites, by common usage became Midway.

As this monument notes, Midway was created in response to dangers generated by "Indian depredations" which arose out of the Blackhawk Indian War. Although this war originated many miles to the south in Sanpete and Sevier Counties,

where Chief Blackhawk incited the Ute Tribes to wage war on the encroaching settlers, the hostilities endangered other remote settlements including those struggling to establish themselves in the Heber Valley.

When Brigham Young heard of the bloodshed and destruction of the war to the south, he advised his people in sparsely-settled districts to move together and to build forts for protection and security. At the time of Brigham Young's decree there were two colonies of settlers on the west side of the Heber Valley. The first colony was established on April 15, 1859, at a cottonwood grove on the banks of Snake Creek with the arrival of the Sidney Epperson, Jeremiah Robey, Mark Smith, David Wood, and Jesse McCarrel families. The second colony was established one year later, during the summer of 1860,



Author David Epperson displays the flag that was made by his great grandmother to be used during the Blackhawk War. Midway's Old Band.

when the Peter Shirts, Ephraim Hanks, Jno Hanks, and Riggs families arrived in the valley and we'll call it Midway." The first step in laying out the fort and settlement was the

organizing the settlers into defined military units for greater security. On June 26, 1866, they organized the militia of Wasatch County and held an inspection drill at Heberville, where a fort had also been recently constructed. Major Witt of Heberville was placed in command of the District which had three battalions—one of cavalry and two of infantry—to be known as the Wasatch Military District. Sidney Epperson and John Hamilton were appointed Majors over Fort Midway, with John Watkins as bugler.

Fort Midway was conducted under military law, having officers and picket patrol, with men arising to assigned duty at the call of the bugle. The militia was in complete charge of all activities necessary for the welfare and general good of the community.

*Best Wishes
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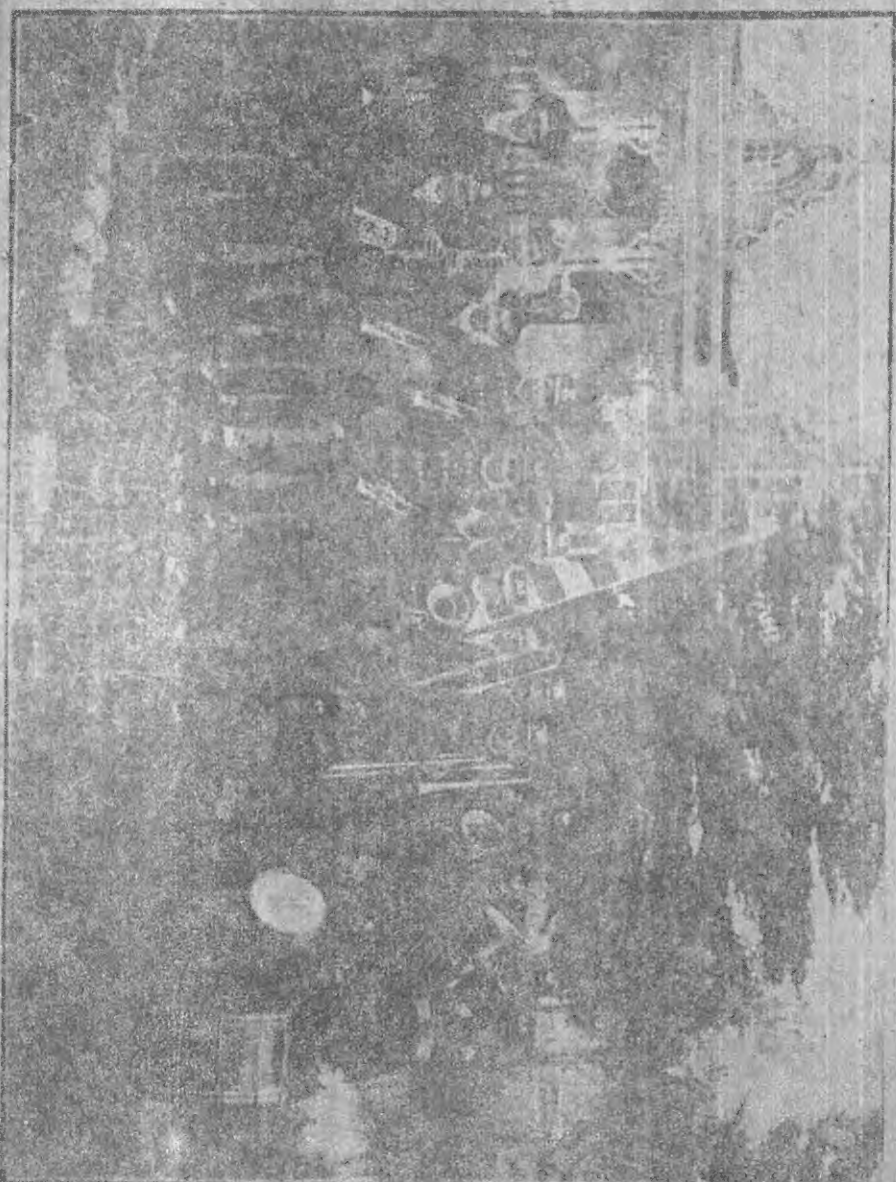
Midway Flag

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With the organization of the Military District and the approaching completion of the Fort Midway settlement, Sidney Epperson was concerned about the lack of availability of an American Flag of "colors" to be flown at Fort Midway and to be used on campaign against the Indians. Realizing the importance of having a suitable flag for the battalion and Fort Midway use, Mary Jane Robey Epperson, Sidney's wife, commenced the construction of a large American flag. The material for the flag came from bedsheets, which were hand dyed and sewn. When completed, the flag contained less than the standard 13 stripes of red and blue and had only 18 of the 34 stars typical to the American Flag utilized throughout the Civil War years from 1861 to 1865—an omission necessitated

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THE EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME!

Midway Flag History (Continued)

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ed due to the exigencies of time, material and circumstances.

When completed, the flag was utilized by the Midway Battalion throughout the Blackhawk Indian War, which ended in 1867 after talks between the Indians and Mormon leaders occurred at Mount Pleasant in Sanpete County. At that time, most of the

Ute Indians were persuaded to settle on a reservation in the Uintah Basin. Chief Tabby, another Ute leader in the late summer of 1867, brought tribe members to the Heber Valley, and after smoking the peace pipe with community leaders, entered into a peace agreement. With peace having been declared, the settlers put on a tremendous feast for the Indians and sent them away with gifts including clothing, blankets and hats.

The Blackhawk War lasted for two years and resulted in the

death of fifty settlers and resulted in property loss to the settlers of more than \$1,000,000.00. Fortunately, Fort Midway was never attacked during the Blackhawk War. When it was time to disband, most of the settlers decided to remain near Fort Midway. The old fort location was preserved by the town as a public square and the upper and lower settlements were never rebuilt.

Sidney H. Epperson, in 1872, built a home across the street from the town square, which is now owned and occupied by Winona Epperson. With the disbanding of the fort, the old eighteen star American Flag remained in the possession of Sidney H. Epperson until his death in 1913. Prior to his death, it was carried in special parades and events in Midway and Heber.

Sid Epperson, a grandson of Sidney H. Epperson, carried the old flag on horseback from 1954 through 1960 at the Midway Harvest Festival, later called Swiss Days. The flag remained in the Sidney H. Epperson home until 1967 when Dan and Mollie the last surviving children of Sidney H. Epperson, entrusted the flag to Lethe Coleman Tathge to ensure its preservation. Since

1967 the flag has remained on the second floor of the Midway Town Hall, largely ignored and forgotten.

There are many individuals still residing in the Heber Valley who are fourth-, fifth-, or sixth-generation descendants of the early settlers who "forted in" at Midway during the Blackhawk War. The old fort Midway Flag, now 118 years old,

symbolizes the courage and community spirit of those first

inhabitants of Wasatch County, and it would seem appropriate to make more readily available for public display the "Old Fort Midway Flag" at such special occasions as Swiss Days, where this community celebrates and gives thought to its rich heritage and history.

Come On Out and Enjoy Swiss Days

Good Luck To Swiss Days

Best Wishes!

A Chrysler



The Swiss Days

Celebrate
Swiss Days
At

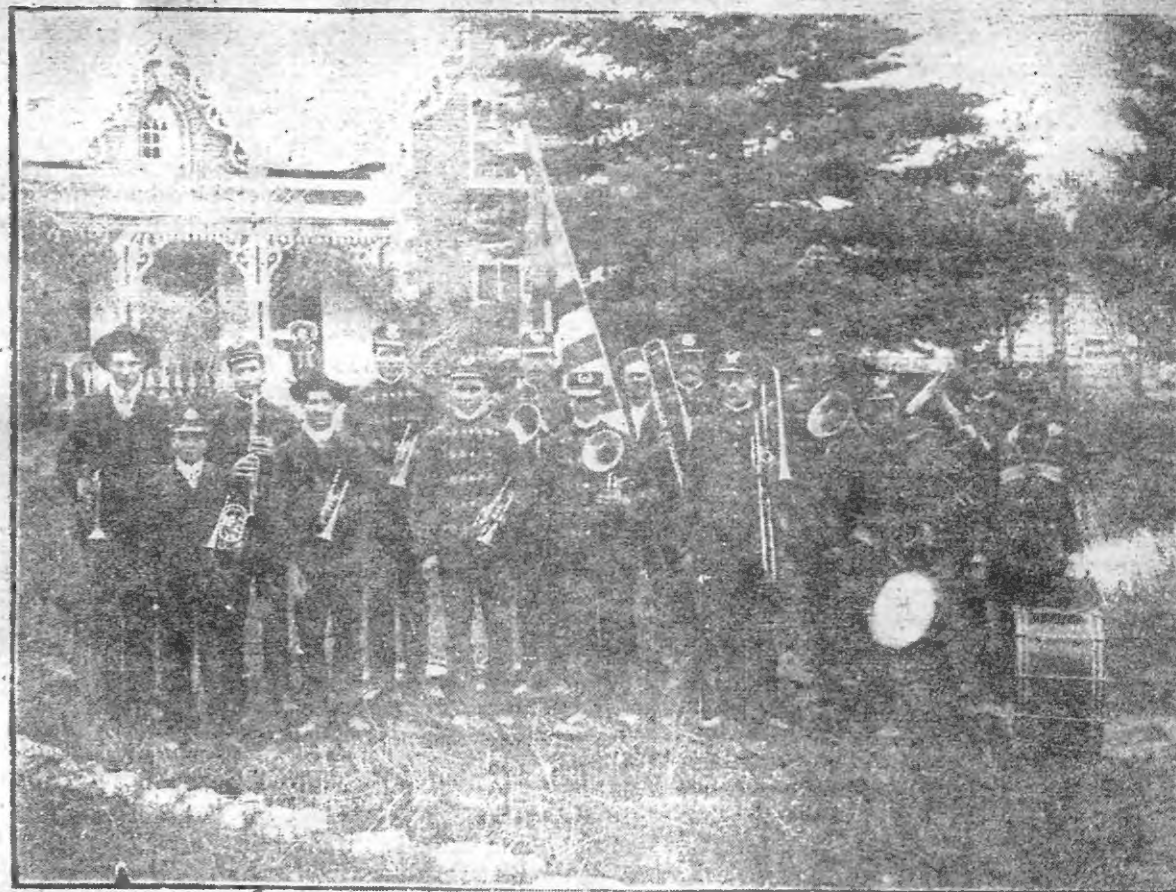
Fort Midway Flag

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